



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**SUPERVISOR RIDLEY-THOMAS' STATEMENT REGARDING  
RECENT RISE IN CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT CASES**

"The spike in recent months of fatal child abuse and neglect cases shows we must intensify our efforts to save our children.

There is no quick fix to the tremendous societal problems underlying the crisis, which include extreme poverty, multi-generational patterns of abuse and an overburdened child welfare system.

But there are problems within the governmental infrastructure -- overseen by the Board of Supervisors -- that we can solve.

One of these is the failure to create a strong database that social workers and others could use to better spot dangerous situations. Such a computerized "early warning system" could, for example, give social workers evidence of child abuse gathered by law enforcement officers.

For more than a decade, County officials and the Board have said social workers, law enforcement, mental health and other officials need to be able to share information through a common network.

After years of sluggish progress, the Family and Children's Index (FCI) began operation in 2005, based on 1990's technology. The outdated system is severely limited and has not had an impact in preventing fatal abuse in Los Angeles County.

I believe better systems exist. Various objections are cited to implementing such systems in Los Angeles County, from privacy concerns to assertions that state laws do not allow methods used successfully in other parts of the country.

This is not a time for excuses. If our state laws need to be amended they can be. We can balance privacy and safety.

To be sure, technology is not a panacea.

I know that in the long term, children's health and safety is possible only when society is safe and healthy. Poverty, poor education and lack of health care all combine to put children in danger. Children are at risk when a mentally ill parent is not receiving regular treatment.

When a parent lacks the education to properly nurture a child physically and emotionally, a child may be jeopardized. Danger also lurks where a lack of transportation, a shortage of medical clinics and unsafe streets stand as obstacles to everything from doctor's appointments to outdoor play.

We in the Second District are attacking this problem on all fronts. We must do so because so many of the children in jeopardy are ours; but we will take on this challenge with both the intensity and thoughtfulness it warrants.

Meanwhile, technology may not be a cure, but it is part of the treatment. We must give the protectors of minors in the County's custody or care, adequate tools for their mission to safeguard children. We wouldn't think of sending soldiers to war carrying jammed rifles; we can't go on asking social workers to use an incomplete children's data network just because it's what we now have.

The foster children of Los Angeles County deserve better."

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